

# *Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church*

971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905

Rev. Presbyter Dragan Vukovic

(814) 244-4063

## *Sunday of Orthodoxy*

*(03.13.2022)*

*John 1:43-51*

The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man (*KJV*)

God's Holy Church celebrates the Sunday of Orthodoxy around the world today. This the first Sunday of Great Lent. The proper presence of icons in God's Holy Church is fundamental to the celebration.

Believers learn immeasurably from holy icons. Holy icons are venerated by believers and are beneficial in serious prayer. Miraculous icons are associated with physical and spiritual healings and in saving events in the Church and community.

Repentance is a major theme during Great Lent and icons facilitate the Lenten journey. Every attentive believer can draw strength from gazing upon icons of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Mother of God and the Saints.

Renewal in Jesus Christ is possible and desired during Great Lent. The Church prescribes the Lenten Fast for believers to take responsibility for personal sin, repent and begin anew in Christ.

Serious repentance and confession followed by communion brings unity with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church nourishes and supports believers in the Lenten journey.

Believers benefit from Great Lent to the extent an investment is made in serious prayer, fasting and charitable works. Increased prayer, fasting and almsgiving are sound investments in the Kingdom of God.

The Lenten journey involves purity of heart and purity of intentions. Increased prayer, fasting and almsgiving are to be done discretely, not to draw attention or praise to the believer.

Increased prayer, fasting and almsgiving are for the benefit of the believer's soul. Too often the soul is tarnished by sin. Honesty with the self and God reveals the extent of personal sin.

Taking responsibility for personal sin, repenting and beginning anew in Christ is possible and encouraged during Great Lent. Joy arises in the heart, mind and soul when repentance occurs and the believer is absolved of sin by Jesus Christ.

Attentive believers are informed of the practices of the Church during Great Lent. Serious believers increase attendance and participation in the Church's Divine services.

Prayer at home, at work and in the community during the course of the day can be increased during Great Lent. Multiple resources from the Church are available for believers to learn more about prayer beneficial to the soul.

Personal relationships are expected to improve during Great Lent. Forgiveness is a dominant theme at the beginning of Great Lent. Forgiveness is to be practiced throughout the Lenten journey.

Forgiveness is beneficial throughout life. Each Lenten journey is an opportunity to ensure forgiveness in personal life and daily relationships. God is good, loving and forgiving.

Believers are expected to imitate the goodness, love and forgiveness shown by God to all humanity. Being forgiven of personal sins is related to practicing forgiveness in daily life.

The home, the parish church and the community challenge the believer to live more like Jesus Christ during the Lenten journey. The current Gospel refers to the deep history of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The Holy Apostles Philip, Andrew, Peter and Nathaniel are named specifically in the present Gospel. Moses and the Holy Prophets are referenced as well. The Church wants believers to always remain mindful of them.

The Holy Gospel provides nourishment for believers during Great Lent, throughout the year and throughout life. We learn from and about Jesus Christ and are united with Jesus Christ in the reading of the Gospel.

The Epistle to the Hebrews states: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” (Heb 13:8) The present Gospel reading in the Divine Liturgy unites attentive believers with the content and nourishes the depths of the soul.

The Lenten journey is underway and continues toward Holy Week and Pascha. The time is at hand to concentrate on the condition of the soul and the opportunity to repent and begin anew in Christ. Unity and newness in Christ lift the believer to new heights.

Jesus told Nathaniel he would see “heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (Jn.1:51) Believers seriously following Jesus Christ will have amazing experiences in life as well.

This Lenten journey is time to change life for the better in the Lord Jesus Christ. Seek the lasting peace, love and joy in Jesus Christ. Be mindful of Jesus Christ on the Cross, and go forth with great resolve in the Lenten journey.

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***First Sunday of Great Lent. Sunday of Orthodoxy. February 28/March 13, 2022.  
Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic***

## **LET MY PRAYER ARISE FROM COARSENESS AND IMPURITY A Homily for Clean Wednesday**

*Let my prayer arise, in Thy sight as incense (Ps. 140:2).*

Alas, how weak and impure everything is within us, even the best and most perfect! If anything precious remained in our nature from its primitive perfection, then it's prayer, by which a man instantly raises above everything earthly and corrupt, higher than the heavens and all things created, comes to the throne of God Himself, and enters into direct communion with Him. With prayer, everything evil and gloomy immediately droops low in the soul, and everything pure and good comes to life and receives strength; with prayer, the mind brightens, the senses soften, the will becomes free, the conscience becomes clearer, the soul calms down, and the body itself is put in order and becomes not so earthly and heavy. Prayer is, as it were, a kind of contact

with the Godhead, bringing supernatural power down into us and changing our entire being for the better.

But alas, the inherent corruption and impurity of our fallen nature are so great that they penetrate our very prayer to the point that they often take away all its power, making it dead and barren. And if only barren! There are also such prayers that turn into sin on the part of the one praying. Thus, the holy Church, among other subjects of petitions, teaches us to pray about our prayer itself, that it might be as it ought: *Let my prayer arise, in Thy sight as incense.*

“Arise” from what? From heaviness and encumbrance, from coarseness and impurity, lethargy and lifelessness.

Forcing themselves, the most sensitive people can stand for a few hours in prayer. But for insensitive people, standing in prayer, especially for a long time, is always a kind of labor after which they even need bodily rest, or they won’t be able to do anything else for a time. Is it not a sign that the spirit of prayer has so withdrawn from us that it has become as if foreign, having nothing in common with us? For prayer itself shouldn’t be a burden and labor for us, but a joy, peace, and pleasure. Look at the angelic world—they don’t have our needs or temptations, our sorrows and woes, and yet the Cherubim and Seraphim surrounding the throne of God cry out: *Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts* (Is. 6:3); they cry out and never grow weary. Why? Because prayer is a necessity of their being. For the celestials, to grow weary of praying would be like us growing weary of breathing.

Do we, beloved listener, seek this sleepless prayer of the Seraphim for ourselves? May those who can, accept this high gift! For us, it would be no small gift if our prayer at first ceases to be like a rock on the back of our neck, holding us down to the earth; if we, at least in the midst of our temporary prayer, wouldn’t be like wingless birds that want to rise to the heights and immediately fall out of the sky.

Thus, “Let my prayer arise before Thee, O Lord!” May my cold and unfeeling heart at least be like the censer I behold during the Divine services! As with a censer, after filling it with fire, incense irresistibly ascends upward to the vaults of the church, so let my thoughts and feelings soar to the throne of Thy grace, when the holy Church ignites them with the fire of its prayers and hymns! As a censer becomes lighter when the incense flies out of it, so do I become lighter in heart and spirit after prayer, ready to do good deeds!

The second failure of our prayer is its crudeness and impurity. On our own, *we know not what we should pray for as we ought* (Rom. 8:26). But even taught to pray as we ought by the Lord Himself, we don't pray as though we've been taught. It's instilled in us to pray—may His Kingdom come and His will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven (Mt. 6:10), but we would like, through our prayer itself, to extend our own dominion over everything and subordinate everything to our blind arbitrariness. We're permitted only to ask only for our daily bread, that is, as many earthly goods as are necessary for our short time on earth, but we would like to seize all earthly goods. We would rejoice and have fun if no one had any bread left, and it was all in our storehouses. We're forbidden to come before the face of God without having reconciled with our brother, without having forgiven the debts of those who slander us, that is, everyone who is guilty of anything before us; and we who are vindictive, are ready, sometimes in the very midst of prayer, to entreat revenge on our so-called enemies. What enemies? Enemies who sometimes suffer far more from us than we do from them. All of this and much worse comes from the fact that our prayer, instead of the fragrance of faith and love, spreads the deadly stench of pride, malice, and covetousness around us.

How then, beginning to pray, can I not first of all raise up a voice saying with humility: "Let my prayer arise... before Thee," Lord! May all earthly and impure thoughts depart from me! May I recognize my true needs, above all; may I not forget my sinful poverty and the need to amend my life at this time, and may my spiritual renewal become the first and last object of my desire and petitions before Thee! But if I, a fool, having forgotten all this, ever appear in Thy church, O Lord, with sensual desires, with petitions that would be injurious for me if fulfilled, then may my heart be like an extinguished censer during this impure prayer! When it no longer has the incense of faith and love, then at least let not the pestilential stench of malice and deceit come from it! *Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth* (Ps. 136:6), that I might be unable to speak!

Finally, our prayers, even in their most purified form, are for the most part weak and lifeless, and therefore ineffective. We sometimes pray for spiritual goods, for example, for the coming of the Kingdom of God, but so feebly as if these goods either don't actually exist or aren't worth much. We sometimes ask to be freed from sins and passions, but so coldly as though our wicked life were an evil of no great importance, from which it wouldn't be bad to be freed, but with which, however, we could live without much harm until death. We seemingly give our fate and that of our loved ones over to the will of God, but almost like how we call ourselves the most humble servants of all—that is, in words alone, without thinking we've committed

ourselves to anything. Instead of reviving us and strengthening us on the path of life, such a weak and lifeless prayer often weakens our conscience, plunging us into spiritual recklessness. After such prayer, we're just as weak for good deeds, just as infirm to fight temptations and passions, just as inconsolable among sorrows and temptations and often almost further from our salvation.

How can we help this impotence and lifelessness in prayer? The same way you help a fading censer—by fanning the previous flame, or starting a new one. Where can I get the breath and fire for this? A certain part of both can be found, with the help of God, within our very selves. From intensified, oft repeated reflection on the hapless state of a sinner like ourselves, a certain waft of thoughts may occur that isn't capable of stimulating the fading prayer. From the movement of spiritual feelings—at the thought of God, eternity, our Savior and His sufferings—a warmth can be born in the heart, which turns into prayer. But let none be deceived—all this isn't enough for our prayer to become like fragrant incense. For this, a breath from above is needed—the grace of God; the immaterial fire of the Holy Spirit is needed, which, according to St. Paul, passes *to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow* (Heb. 4:12), consuming everything impure and sinful in them. For the man upon whom the Spirit “blows ... as is meet,” which, in the expression of the holy Church, “taketh him away from among the things of the earth,”<sup>[1]</sup> is no longer so much the man who prays as much as the Spirit of God, interceding in him and for him *with groanings which cannot be uttered* (Rom. 8:26). And the man? In the midst of this prayer of the Spirit, according to the testimony of people who have experienced this state, it's like metal penetrated by fire. Then no impurity can cling to the soul, or it immediately disappears of itself. Then the whole world is forgotten; there is no other feeling but the all-filling and all-replacing presence of God; there are no other desires, save that which St. Peter had on Mt. Tabor: the thirst to remain in this blessed state forever. The flesh, having become spiritualized, either remains silent, as if non-existent, or soars after the spirit and is ready to pour out tears and fly away in lamentations. Then it's no longer the mind and will, but the whole being of man, like incense in the sight of God. St. David sought and desired this state when he cried out in his prayer to the Lord: *For my heart was fired!* (Ps. 72:21). And when this Heavenly fire descended upon him, his heart *poured forth a good word*, and his tongue became the *pen of a swiftly writing scribe* (Ps. 44:1).

Someone may ask how to attract such grace of the Spirit into the heart. Above all, beloved, by humility and a sense of our insignificance, constant prayerful desire for the grace of God, and purity of thoughts and intentions! A humble heart and a contrite

spirit the Lord will never despise (Ps. 50:19)! The soul that desires prayer and grace will never be left without the help of the Holy Spirit! Amen.

*St. Innocent of Kherson*  
*Translation by Jesse Dominick*

*The Prologue from Ochrid*  
*St. Nikolai of Zhicha*  
*(03.013.2022)*

**THE HIEROMARTYR [PRIESTLY-MARTYR] PROTERIUS**

This saint was a presbyter in Alexandria at the same time Dioscorus the heretic was Patriarch of Alexandria. Dioscorus was one of the leaders of the Monophysite heresy, which taught that there is one nature in Christ [human] and not two natures [human and divine]. At that time Marcian and Pulcheria were on the imperial throne. This holy and devout man, Proterius, stood up against Dioscorus for which he endured much misery. Then the Fourth Ecumenical Council [Chalcedon, 451 A.D.] was convened, at which the Monophysite heresy was condemned. Dioscorus was removed from the patriarchal throne and exiled. Proterius, this right-believing man, was elected in his place. He governed the Church with zeal and love--as a true follower of Christ. However, the followers of Dioscorus did not cease to create a disturbance in Alexandria. At the time of one such bloody disturbance, Proterius left the city with the intention of staying away temporarily. Along the way, the Prophet Isaiah appeared to him in a vision and said: "Return to the city, I am waiting to take you." Proterius returned to Alexandria and entered the church. Upon learning of this, the enraged heretics rushed into the church, seized the patriarch and stabbed him all over with knives. Six other Christians were also slain with Proterius. Thus Proterius, this wonderful shepherd of Christ's flock, received a martyr's wreath for the truth of Orthodoxy, in the year 457 A.D.

**SAINT BASIL THE CONFESSOR**

Basil was a companion and fellow sufferer with St. Procopius of Decapolis. Basil faithfully followed his teacher Procopius, both in peaceful times and in times of persecution. He endured much torment from the iconoclasts. When the iconoclasts were defeated, Basil, according to God's providence, returned to his monastery

together with Procopius. There he lived a long life of asceticism in fasting and prayer. He died peacefully in the year 747 A.D.

### **THE HIEROMARTYR [PRIEST-MARTYR] NESTOR**

Nestor was the bishop of Magydos [in Pamphylia]. He was distinguished by his great meekness. During the reign of Decius, he was brought to trial and cruelly tortured for Christ. Before his death, he saw in a vision a sacrificial lamb, which he interpreted as a sign of his impending sacrifice. He was tortured by the Eparch Publius and in the end was crucified in Perga [the capital of the province] in the year 250 A.D.

### **BLESSED NICHOLAS, FOOL-FOR-CHRIST OF PSKOV**

Nicholas lived as a fool-for-Christ in the town of Pskov during the reign of Tsar Ivan the Terrible, and died on February 28, 1576 A.D.

### **HYMN OF PRAISE TWO NATURES**

The Lord united two natures;  
He does not separate them anymore:  
Human and Divine.  
He does not separate them anymore:  
God and Man--One Person.  
In both respects undiminished,  
The God-man and Savior,  
The Unifier of that which was separated,  
The Interpreter of the eternal mysteries,  
The Founder of the Kingdom of the saints.  
God came closer to man,  
Eternity descended, time was lifted up.  
Of the Holy Trinity, Christ is the trumpet;  
Of the two natures, Christ is the mystery.  
The true God became man,



Remained above and lowered Himself down.

He neither fell nor stumbled,  
But wrapped Himself in flesh.

That is holy, pure love,  
Love eternal, eternally the same.

He raised a giant with His small finger,  
And this is incomprehensible to the mind.

## REFLECTION

Fools-for-Christ were distinguished by rare fearlessness. Blessed Nicholas ran through the streets of Pskov pretending insanity, rebuking the people for their hidden sins and prophesying that which would befall them. When Ivan the Terrible entered Pskov, the entire town was in terror of the terrible tsar. As a welcome to the tsar, bread and salt were placed in front of every home, but the people did not appear. When the governor of the town presented the tsar with bread and salt on a tray before the church, the tsar pushed the tray away, so that the bread and salt fell to the ground. Then, Blessed Nicholas appeared before the tsar in a long shirt tied with a rope, hopping around on a cane like a child. Then he cried out: "Ivanuska, Ivanuska, eat bread and salt and not human blood." The soldiers rushed out to catch him but he fled and hid. The tsar, learning about this Blessed Nicholas--who and what he was--visited him in his scant living quarters. It was the first week of Great Lent. Upon hearing that the tsar was coming to visit him, Nicholas found a piece of raw meat. When the tsar entered his cell, Nicholas bowed and offered the meat to the tsar. "Eat Ivanusha, eat!" Angrily, the terrible tsar replied: "I am a Christian and I do not eat meat during the Fast." Then the man of God quickly responded to him: "But you do even worse: you feed on men's flesh and blood, forgetting not only Lent but also God!" This lesson entered deeply into the heart of Tsar Ivan, and he, ashamed, immediately departed Pskov, where he had intended to perpetrate a great massacre.

## CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the Lord Jesus as the Bread of Life: *I am that Bread of Life* (John 6:48):

1. As the Bread by which the soul is nourished and lives;
2. As the Bread by which the mind is nourished and enlightened;
3. As the Bread by which the heart is nourished and ennobled.

## **HOMILY**

### **on the nourishment of the soul**

"I am that Bread of Life " (John 6:48).

Thus spoke the Lord Jesus to the hungry human race. These words have been proved throughout the centuries to Christ's innumerable followers, who have received the Lord as the nourishment of their souls. A desperate young man who was close to suicide confessed to a spiritual father. The spiritual father listened to him carefully and said to him: "My son, you are to blame for your misfortune. Your soul is starved to death. Throughout your entire life, you learned only how to nourish your body, but you never thought that the soul requires greater and more frequent nourishment than the body. Your soul is on the verge of dying from hunger. My son, eat and drink Christ [Holy Communion]. Only this can restore your soul from death. Every day eat and drink of Christ. He is the Life-creating Bread of our souls." The young man obeyed the elder and returned to life.

Brethren, let us nourish our souls with Christ, that our souls may be alive and healthy. Let us continually nourish our minds with Christ's thoughts, that our minds might be enlightened and clear. Let us continually nourish our hearts with the love of Christ, that our hearts might be full and joyful. Let us continually nourish our wills with the commandments of Christ and the example of Christ, that our wills might perform good deeds every minute. Let Christ's thoughts be our thoughts and Christ's love be our love and Christ's good will be our good will. Let us continually nourish our souls with Christ the Lord; with our soul let us continually eat Him and drink Him! There is no more nourishing Bread than He; there is no sweeter drink than He. In Holy Communion, He gives Himself completely to us, Body and Blood. But Holy Communion is a reminder that our souls must continually be nourished by Him, continually eat Him and drink Him just as we continually breathe.

O our good and sweet Lord, stir up our souls that they may continually nourish themselves with Thee and remain alive. Thou art our Bread of Life.  
**To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.**

**Services this Week**

- ❖ **Saturday – March 19<sup>th</sup> – PARACLESIS - THE OFFICE OF SUPPLICATION TO SAINT NECTARIOS -05:00 PM - Confession**
- ❖ **2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent (St Gregory Palamas) (Sunday, Mach 20<sup>th</sup>) – 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy**

**Donations March 6, 2022**

**Offering - \$1,258.00 Candles - \$41.00**

**Building Fund**

**In Memory of Lillian Fleck from Cameron Palmer - \$50.00**

**Large Candles**

**In Memory of Julie Lambrinos from Kumovi Dan & Dyne Tomak**

**In Memory of Parents, Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Robert & Milica Knepp**

**In Memory of Ranka Marinkovich from Richard Kondas**

**In Memory of Ed Gartrell from Steve Purich**

**In Memory of Linda (Locher) Leckrone from Dorothy Podolak**

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**HOME BLESSINGS**

**Please contact Father Dragan to schedule a time to have your Home Blessed!**

**(814) 244-4063**

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**CONFESSION**

**Father Dragan will have Confession following the Canon to St Nectarios**

**which is held every Saturday at 5:00 PM**

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**SALE!!!!**

**The kolo is selling Nut, Poppyseed, Apricot and Lekvar - \$10/each  
And Pumpkin Rolls - \$8/each – while supplies last**

**Please see Pat Niel**

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**IMPORTANT DATES**

**TODAY**

**Sunday, March 13th – Sunday of Orhodoxy**

**Luncheon following Divine Liturgy**

**Shrimp, French Fries, Fried Cabbage**

**Orthodoxy Sunday Vespers will be held at Christ the Saviour**

**Cathedral At 3:00 PM (March 13th)**

**LENTEN FISH FRIES**

**3:00 to 6:30 PM**

**Eat in or Take out (Limited Seating)**

**Fridays, March 18th thru April 15th**

**Please notify Suzette Gardenhour of the Friday's you can work!!**

**A big thank you to ALL parishioners who have stepped up to  
work to make our Fish Fries a success so far. A VERY special**

**thanks to OUR kids: Brayden Simms, Marcus Simms, Ben**

**Ribaric,**

**Eli Ribaric, Quinn Komar, Meara Gleason, Amelia Ribaric, Nik**

**Ribaric and Jonathan Gleason!**

**Lots of great compliments about their help!**

**SAVE THESE DATES!!!!**

**SUNDAY, MARCH 20, 2022 – Vesper Service – 6:00 PM**

**Refreshments to follow.**

**Saturday, May 14th – Taste of Serbia**

**Sunday, May 22th – St. Nicholas Anniversary Celebration**

**Polka Fest – June 3-5, 2022**